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Associated Press

A truck kicks up a spray as it crosses Sturgeon River Road near Chassell. Flooding closed the road in Houghton County.

## Rapid melting of snow in U.P. triggers floods

By Associated Press

**IRONWOOD** -- Sandbags were being stacked on flooded streets Thursday as volunteers and others worked "feverishly to save the town" of Wakefield, a Michigan National Guard official said.

Capt. James Webber, an assistant brigade engineer, said an additional 45 Guard troops were heading to the area. Some 60 troops already were in place in the western Upper Peninsula.

The top two priorities for the National Guard were to get sandbags around Wakefield's Ameritech building and the State Police post there.

"If communications go down, people are going to panic. We want to keep everybody's morale up," Webber said.

Unusually warm temperatures Tuesday and Wednesday caused the snow bank in Michigan's far north to melt rapidly, sending many waterways spilling over their banks.

Gov. John Engler on Wednesday declared Gogebic County and the city of Ironwood a disaster area.



Associated Press

Two huge culverts were bent by the force of floodwaters when the Carp River washed out a section of M-553 near Marquette. About 65 feet of the road was washed out, resulting in long detours.

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(updated  
08/09/2001).

The National Guard worked alongside local emergency-management officials and civilian volunteers Wednesday, filling and stacking sandbags to keep as much of the Montreal River out of the city as possible.

The river, which was several feet above flood stage, separates the far western Upper Peninsula from Wisconsin.

Though no injuries were reported, about 50 people were evacuated from their homes in the Ironwood area, said Deputy Jay Kangas of the Gogebic Sheriff's Department. Rising waters landlocked another 25 to 40 people in nearby Ironwood and Bessemer townships.

"The situation in Ironwood is a little more stable," Bruce Davey, deputy sheriff for Gogebic County and spokesman for the emergency operations center, said Thursday morning.

The river level dropped overnight, he said.

Wakefield, which sits east of Ironwood, had become the new problem area, Davey said.

Since 7 p.m. Wednesday, the water level rose 5 inches here. Sunday Lake overflowed, and floodwaters were coming in some of the streams that feed it.

A number of low-lying areas in Wakefield were flooded, and the flooded area was spreading. Some residences flooded, and the city shut off power to 18 homes in Wakefield, he said.

Authorities were looking at a number of options to reduce water, including digging a trench to an abandoned iron pit about a mile long, and allowing some water to drain there.

Davey said some people weren't cooperating with the flood barriers that were set up.

"We have people driving around flooded areas. We have kids playing in the floodwaters. People are driving around like they're celebrating the Fourth of July. We will criminally charge people that go behind the barriers," he said.

The American Red Cross placed many stranded residents in area motels.

"This is our dead time of year, usually," said Brian McCartney, desk clerk at the Comfort Inn of Ironwood, which rented about two-thirds of its rooms Wednesday night.

Even for those not forced from their homes, the high water was a headache. It prevented McCartney, who delivers the Daily Globe, from completing his route.

In the eastern Gogebic County community of Watersmeet, barriers prevented motorists from traveling any further west on U.S. 2, parts of which were shut down along with about 20 other roads in the county.

Ontonagon resident Walt Veldman, who delivers mail in Ironwood, had to travel south into Wisconsin and add about 100 miles to his regular 60-mile evening commute.

"I'll make it home tonight, but if it's like this tomorrow, I can't get to work," Veldman said during a stop in Watersmeet.

State highway 28, the main road to Marquette, also was closed.

The National Weather Service reported that two 10-foot sections of a dam on the Presque Isle River south of Marenisco had washed out and the dam was in danger of failing.

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